Miss Winifred A. Tims,
1616 11th Ave. West,
Calgary, Alta.

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Short Story. THE RIVALS. About 3500 words.

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The Reverend Thomas Pyne shepherded a large and varied flock. In his prairie parish of some hundreds of square miles were people of many nationalities and all grades of society. And the "Reverend Tom," as he was familiarly called by his parishioners, was welcomed in every home, whether the squalid tepee of the Indian, the homestead of the Ruthenian, or the more pretentious abode of the "Old Country" gentleman who had made his pile and had comfortably retired. His unassuming geniality and readiness to give a hand whenever and wherever it was needed, had proved the "Open Sesame" into the hearts and homes of his people, and wherever he went he was made one of the family.

It was one evening in early autumn. In his small log cottage on the Lone Pine Reservation, the Reverend Tom, having concluded his semi-weekly dishwashing, rattled the last plate into the cupboard and heaved a sigh of relief, reflecting that now his supply of dishes would last for at least four days, unless an unusual number of guests presented themselves.

He drew down his shirt-sleeves and took the oil lamp from the bracket.

"Now," he remarked aloud, in a tone of extreme satisfaction, "we shall see how the excellent Father Brown has been using his undoubted talents since last we met him!"

But scarcely had he seated himself in his one easy chair and taken up his book, when there came a knock at the door; a diffident, bashful-sounding knock. The young missionary's face fell. He replaced the book on the table, and lamp in hand returned to the kitchen.

"Oh, come in!" he called out resignedly; then louder and

more warmly, "Come in!"

The door opened, and a tall, thin-featured Indian entered.

"Oh, it's you, Billy Speaker," greeted the Reverend Tom, shaking hands with his visitor."How are things with you? All right? That's good. Have a seat."

Accepting the only chair the little kitchen boasted, Billy tucked his hat beneath it, whilst his host, having set the lamp upon the table, ensconsed himself upon an upturned apple-box. He took out his tobacco pouch, and offering it first to the Indian, proceeded to fill his pipe; and the two were soon puffing away in an amicable silence that lasted for some time.

At length, with some hesitation, Billy broached the subject of his visit.

"Mr. Pyne," he began, awkwardly, " I want to get married."

"The Reverend Tom looked up, surprised.

"Oh, indeed. Who's the lucky woman?"

"Mary Soup," replied Billy.

Pyne certainly was surprised now. Mary was a young widow, whose lately departed spouse had left her a log house, a field or two, some horses, and a broken-down democrat. She was therefore looked upon as a lady of wealth, and quite the most eligible of her tribe. Moreover, her personal attractions were not to be despised, for her round, smiling face, and plump figure were the admiration of all the young men, and there was not a little little rivalry as to who should succeed the deceased husband in her affections.

But Billy was a happy-go-lucky, cheerful young vagabond, working only when grim necessity compelled, and quite happily

accustomed to sponge upon any of his long-suffering friends who would give him a meal or lend him a dollar.

"Have you asked her?" enquired the missionary, tapping his pipe on his heel.

"Oh, yes," Billy assured him, "I asked her yesterday."

" I did'nt know you were in the running at all," remarked the Reverent Tom, as he rammed a fresh pipeful of tobacco down into the bowl.

"That George Manyberries, he thinks he's going to have her," returned the Indian, with some indignation, " but he's mistaken. Mary does'nt want a fellow like that."

"When was this arranged, did you say? This is the first I've heard of it."

"I saw her yesterday," Billy repeated,"and told her I would come and speak to you about the wedding."

"Well, when is it to be?"

"Treaty Day will suit me all right," replied the young man. "That's next Saturday, you know. About eleven o'clock."

"Very well, Billy, I'll be there."

Billy rose to go, then hesitated at the door.

"Mr. Pyne, will you lend me five dollars? I want to buy a new hat for the wedding. See, this is all I've got!" And he offered for the missionary's inspection what was once a black Stetson, but was now a torn and shapeless object, flabby of brim and altogether disreputable.

"Hm," demurred the parson," I don't know about that. When would I get it back? On Treaty day?"

"Oh, no; not on Treaty day. I owe that money already to the agent on payment for a saddle I got in the spring. But after

I'm married, I'll sell one of Mary's horses and pay you then."

"Indeed and you won't," retorted the Reverend Tom, forcibly; "If that's what you're planning to do with Mary's property, she'd be better off without you. No, you can come and work for me next week. I want some fencing done, and you can work the money off in that way."

"All right," grinned Billy cheerfully, and not at all abashed. "I'll come on Monday."

He gravely accepted the bill tendered to him by the reluctant missionary, and took his departure.

The next morning the Reverend Tom, hitched his elderly pony Robin, to the buggy, and set off on a ten-mile drive to town. The trail wound through groves of dark pines, and across steep and narrow coulees. He drove past poplar bluffs and willow scrub, whose leaves were turning to gold since an early frost a few nights before.

Twice he forded a shallow, dashing little creek, which turned and twisted a hundred times in its course along the valley. At each crossing he waited while Robin stopped to drink the clear, gurgling water, thankful for the delicious coolness after the hot dust of the trail. Each time the driver chuckled to see the pony, long after his thirst was quenched, resting his lips upon the water in the hope that his master would imagine he was still drinking, and he would be able to take his ease for a few moments longer. And each time the reins would be jerked, and the pony would jump at the flick of the whip.

"Get up there, you old humbug! Do you really think I'm not up to your tricks by this time"?

Robin turned his head to gaze reproachfully at his hard-hearted driver, then slowly and with dejected mien he dragged the buggy up the bank, indignantly swishing his long tail, and sending a shower of crystal drops spattering over his master's head. Soon, however, he was trotting along at his usual pace; presently they climb climbed the long, winding hill out of the valley, and at the farther end of a dusty stretch of road could be seen the chimneys and elevators of the little town.

Towards them came riding a solitary horseman. As he approached, he held up his hand. The Reverend Tom checked his pony.

"Morning, Mr.Pyne," was the rider's greeting. "I was coming down to see you this afternoon."

"Good-morning, George. What did you want?"

"Well, I want to get married."

" Is that so? Whom are you going to marry?"

"Mary Soup," said George.

The Reverend Tom raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed! And when did you arrange this?"

"Oh, yesterday. I told her I was coming to town today and would buy the ring and license. They cost me ten dollars, too. Say, Mr. Pyne," he broke off from his subject as a sudden thought struck him, "could you lend me five dollars? I want a pair of boots to be married in. These are no good any more. See?"

Pyne surveyed the boot held out to his gaze.

"You certainly need another pair" was his comment. "But if I lend you five dollars, when will I get it back? On Treaty Day?

"Oh no," returned George in a shocked voice, " I want to get mar married that morning; then Mary and I will need our money to go to town and have a good time. But she has a large stack of hay. I'll

sell a load some time next week and pay you then."

"Well", was Pyne!s wrathful reply, "that's a pretty mean way of paying for your clothes, I must say! Anyway, I lent my last five-dollar bill last night, and I haven't another with me".

" That's too bad," returned George resignedly, quite unmoved by the parson's outburst. I'll have to get it somehow. Anyway, we'll be down at the church about eleven o'clock on Saturday morning."

He was about to go when Pyne detained him.

"But see here, George, I understood that Mary Soup was going to marry Billy Speaker."

" That fellow!" George spat upon the ground disgustedly. "Why for would she want to marry him? He's no good!"

" Are you certain that she's going to marry you?"

"Sure," affirmed George, confidently." Why,I told her yesterday I would fix it up. She needs a good man to look after her things,you know. I have the ring and the license here in my pocket.

"I'm dead broke too. Have you as much as a dollar on you?" he added hopefully.

"Yes I have, and it's going to stay there," returned the Reverend Tom, promptly. "I need it myself, George."

"Oh, all right," returned George with resignation. "Well, see you on Saturday, Mr. Pyne."

"All right - if Mary wants you, George."

The Indian put spurs to his horse, and the Reverend Tom resumed his journey, wondering which of the two men who had approached him was the favored suitor. So far as he could see, there was little to choose between them. Both were lazy and unambitious, with not enough of energy to work for one, let alone two and maybe a

family. Both were singularly unprepossessing in appearance, Billy Speaker being of the narrow-eyed, hatchet-faced type, while George Manyberries, with a fat, unwieldy figure, inclined more to a negroid cast of countenance, with hair which had been cut short during a sojourn in the 'Pen' for incorrigible drunkenness, and had now reached a ragged and ungraceful length about the collar of a loud black-and-white checked coat.

Pyne finally decided to visit Mary Soup upon his return from town and find out what her intentions really were.

Accordingly, as the sun was drooping behind the blue mountain peaks, tipping them with gold, and flooding the eastern sky with rosy tints, the missionary tied his horse to Mary's gate-post and walked up the tiny path to the house. A number of mongrel curs greeted him vociferously and followed him, yapping, to the door. It opened before he had time to knock, and Mary Soup herself appeared in the doorway.

She had a singularly sweet smile, and a clean, wholesome appearance, and as he shook hands, then took the chair she set for him, Pyne felt a great distaste for the duty which evidently awaited him, of uniting her to one or other of the two loafers who had both seemed so sure of her.

An old woman squatted on the floor, feeding the little box stove with bits of poplar sticks, which gave out a thick, acrid odor.

After a little desultory chat, Pyne switched the conversation around to the forthcoming marriage.

"I hear you are to be married on Saturday, Mary!"

Her eyes opened wide.

"Who told you that?" she countered.

"Well, Billy Speaker for one. In fact, he told be he was to be the bridegroom!"

Mary colored deeply.

"Did he say that? I never said so!"

" Well" demanded Pyne, "what made him think so?"

"Oh," burst out the girl, impatiently, "this woman here, she is my husband's mother, you know. She is always telling me I should marry him!"

" But why?" enquired Pyne.

"Billy is her sister's son. She says I ought to marry him so as to keep the horses and other things in the family. She tells him that,too. It was she who suggested that we should be married on Treaty Day. She told him she would talk me into it, and he believes her."

The old woman muttered something in a fierce undertone, but subsided as Mary answered her shortly in her own tongue.

" Then there's George Manyberries," suggested the Missionary; "what about him?"

"George!" retorted Mary, contemptously. "That fellow's so conceited, he won't believe me when I tell him I dont want him!"

"I must say I don't think either of them is good enough for you, Mary. Then there will be no wedding on Saturday after all?"

"N-No- I don't think so," she hesitated.

"If you should change your mind, I'll be at the Mission House all day Saturday. Goodbye."

He shook hands again and made his way home.

" I just wonder", he ruminated, " if that old woman will persuade the girl to marry Billy after all. I shouldn't be sup-

rised if she nagged her into it. That sort of thing has happened before, and nagging's a thing no Indian can stand much of. But George hasn't much of a chance, apparently. That's a good thing, at any rate."

So it was with little suprise that on Saturday morning he received a summons to the church near by. And shortly before eleven o'clock, a gaily dressed group of Indians, laughing and talking, was gathered outside the church door. Mary resplendent in kerchief of emerald silk, cherry-colored shawl, and boots with high, spiky heels, was blushing and giggling at the teasing remarks flung at her by one or another of her friends. Close at hand, the Reverend Tom, in long black cassock was in grave conversation with a tall pleasant-faced young man.

Towards the church from opposite directions came two riders, who reached the church at the same instant. Flinging themselves from their horses, they glanced suspiciously at one another, and jostled shoulders as they hurried into the enclosure.

Together they placed themselves in front of the missionary.

"I'm ready, Mr.Pyne," gasped Billy, valiantly.

"I'm ready, Mr. Pyne!" followed George's voice like an echo. Boldly he called to the bride, "Come on, Mary!"

A shout of laughter broke from the crowd. Both men wheeled, then stood as if turned to stone. With staring eyes and jaws agape, they watched the bride clamber into the new top-buggy that stood just outside the gate. They watched the pleasant-faced young man climb in beside her, pick up the reins, and drive away.

Speechless they turned to the Missionary.

Why, boys," he asked, astonished,"didn't you know? I've just married Mary to that young Blackfoot, Bob Weaseltail!"